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Subject: Farm Bill 2007 Official Comments - 08/29/2005 08:38 PM CDT
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Question1:

Question2:

Question3:

Question4:

Question5: The Federal rural programs could best assist me, as a business owner, in helping to extend public utilities to my lodge for the opportunity to expand my business, stabilize my utility costs, address privacy and security concerns, and prevent the possibility of environmental damage to my property, our water well and the Little Susitna River from fuel spills.

My lodge is located at Mile 14 Palmer Fishhook Rd., 14 miles from the Glenn Hwy. I've owned the lodge for 15 years. Utilities (electric and phone) are approximately 3 miles from my lodge. Traffic in the area has increased exponentially every year since I've owned the lodge. The road is now paved as far as Independence Mine, bringing with it tourist buses, rental cars and motorcycles. As demand grows, we are not able to meet the needs with our current utility set up.

We currently depend on 2 diesel generators for power. With electrical service, we would be able to expand beyond our 14 rooms to our desired 50 rooms, delete the generator's noise and air pollution, and rest easier regarding the danger of a fuel spill (we have tanks to hold 2,500 gallons of fuel next to the Little Susitna River).

Rising costs of fuel are a huge concern to us. Fuel costs averaged \$1,787.00 per month in 2003, \$2,130.00 in 2004 (46% increase in one year), and so far in 2005, fuel costs have averaged \$3,015.00 per month (69% increase over 2003) and are still rising. Additional costs of running on generators are replacement and monthly maintenance costs for the generator itself (\$30,000.00 was spent in 2002 for equipment replacement alone), increased maintenance and reduction of life span for equipment in the lodge due to power fluctuations and load shifting, and increased payroll as someone has to be at the lodge all the time that knows how to monitor and/or restart the generator, if it goes down or has a problem. We also constantly have to monitor our power needs to determine if we need to switch generators from the 35 kw to the 50 kw, and not forget to monitor our fuel, so we switch tanks before running dry.

Other businesses in the area, including the Independence Mine, would also benefit from utility extension. Approximately thirty four acres, one mile below the lodge, is for sale, and a big factor in it not selling is the lack of utilities. The State might also benefit economically by installing coin operated electrical service posts to be placed in the Gold Mint Trail Parking area for motor home plug-ins to help foot the cost of the Park Service.

I understand our radio phone is the last of its kind in the MTA service area. For reception, we rotate our antenna to bounce off a snow field in winter and a rock face in summer. With sun spots, sometimes we have no service at all. We cannot fax, receive internet, nor have more than one line. We are not able to maintain an office at the lodge with such restrictions. We have the expense of maintaining a separate office in Palmer just to be able to do business.

There are also safety and privacy concerns with the radio phone. Many times we have accidents or emergencies in the local area (avalanche rescue, skier or snowmobile accidents, etc.) that require staging from the lodge by the State Troopers and Park Rangers. Cell phones do not work at the lodge, so our one line is utilized for emergency communication. Public safety is also a concern in that there is no pay phone in the area. Repeatedly we have had people pounding on our door in the middle of the night in winter after going off the road or having car trouble. For security reasons, we do not let them in to use the phone, but will make a call for them. This wakes up our guests as well as our employees, and we have even had people become aggressive and angry that we won't let them inside in the middle of the night. Privacy issues include the problem that our radio phone is easily monitored by anyone with a scanner. We understand that a former employee listens to our conversations as her standing entertainment, and reports the best conversations to the local bar where she now works. With credit card security laws and business and guest confidentiality, we are always on guard for what we say on the phone. Just the idea of knowing someone is always listening to our calls is unsettling to say the least.

With no utilities, I also explored the possibility of installing hydro power. However, the grant/loan program offered by Rural Development for alternate energy production specifically excludes hydro. Besides extending utilities, I suggest including hydro electric power in that loan and grant program.

Question6: